



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

NOTICE OF DECISION

July 27, 2006

PO Box 1630
Miles City MT 59301

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

The attached decision notice approves the Hell Creek State Park Trails Project outlined in our June 2006 Environmental Assessment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Hell Creek State Park- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks with cooperation from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS—CMR) are proposing to create two non-motorized hiking trails and one combination (motorized part way and then non-motorized traffic only) with a trailhead and two parking lots adjacent to the trailheads.

Specifically, the proposed project will construct and create three hiking trails:

- Construct self-guided wildlife viewing trails, specifically Cold Turkey and the existing motorized trail # 452 in a cooperative effort with CMR. Additionally, a trailhead including a designated parking lot and interpretive signage with trail markers will also be constructed.
- Construct and expand the existing footpath near the bone pile area to a hiking/biking trail for an easy trail loop for park visitors.
- Enlarge and gravel parking and trailhead areas.

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

Public notification of the availability of a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating this proposed action was published in local and statewide newspapers, and on the FWP website. In addition, copies of the Draft EA were distributed to interested individuals, organizations, county, state and federal agencies. The public was given the opportunity to comment on the proposed project, because this is a development project within a state park (Montana Code Annotated MCA 23-1-110 and 12-8-602).

The public comment period began May 30, 2006 and ran through June 30, 2006. Two comments were received, all in favor of the trails improvement and development. Both gentlemen did raise some concern with Route 452 since the trail would be partially motorized. Both comments stated, "I have no problem with the non-motorized trails but the motorized route could potentially damage the environment." *FWP Response:*

Route # 452 was the original county road that went from Jordan to Hell Creek and it has been and will remain designated as an open road until abandonment. The motorized trail will not incur any further development than what is already established. The trail

will merely have an established parking area with a trailhead and interpretive signage and possibly a couple of picnic benches along the way. We will also reduce the erosion by installing a few water bars to divert the water for a better drainage system. Basically we are only enhancing an already established two track while adding educational and historical information for all individuals to enjoy.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information was obtained after the release of the Draft EA that contributes to the project analysis.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and US Fish & Wildlife Service--Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (both landowners of the project area) conducted a file search for cultural and archeological sites in the area and cultural surveys indicate that the proposed project would have a low likelihood of impacting cultural or archeological properties.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Biologist, Bernie Hildebrand, was questioned regarding Threatened and Endangered Species utilization of the project area. After conducting a biological review of the project area, Bernie Hildebrand indicated that no T & E species utilize the project area and that the project development would have a low impact on any species currently in the project area.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Draft EA, public comments, additional information and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant impact on the natural or human environment. Therefore an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

It is my decision to implement the proposed project, and proceed with the Hell Creek and CMR Trails project as identified in the EA. No comments opposed the proposed project; therefore, an appeal period is not applicable. The project should begin as soon as FWP is awarded Recreational Trails Grant funds.

There are no modifications to the Draft EA. The Draft EA, together with the Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal.

The EA and Decision Notice may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks at the above address or online at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>.

Please direct any further requests or questions to Bryce Christensen, Regional Supervisor, at the address above, (406) 234-0900 or bchristensen@mt.gov.



Bryce Christensen

Regional Supervisor